

Here to help you with
your dog moving on



To help you with your loss

We recognise that when your Canine Partners dog moves on into Assistance Dog Training, gets withdrawn from the programme, or changes home, this can be a difficult time and can invoke a range of emotions. We have created this pack as a resource of support, to outline what you can anticipate from us and, should you wish to gain further support, we have identified some key external resources.

*Dogs come into our lives to teach us about love,
They depart to teach us about loss,
A new dog never replaces an old dog,
It merely expands the heart.
If you have loved many dogs,
your heart is very big.*

Erica Jong

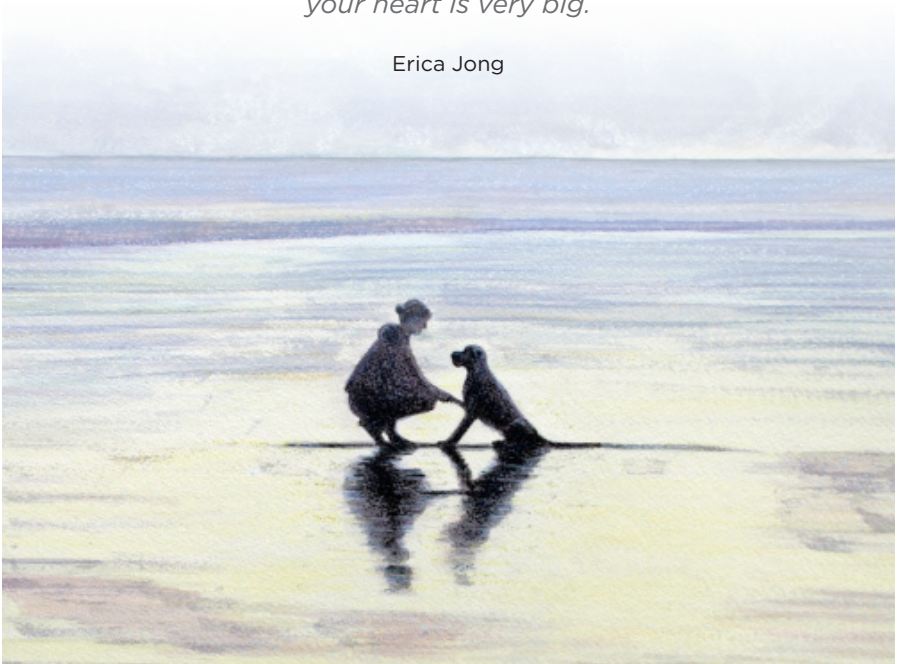


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Grief

As your Canine Partners dog moves on, you may find yourself grieving a loss. It is important to recognise that there is no right or wrong way to grieve, everybody is an individual and their emotions are unique to them. The grieving process takes time and will happen gradually and naturally. Remember to be patient with yourself and your loved ones, who may also be grieving.

There are many emotional and physical aspects of grief. Traditionally it is thought that grief involves a five-stage cycle. There are now thought to be two additional stages of bereavement: Shock, Denial, Guilt, Anger, Bargaining, Depression and Acceptance. The stages of grief are completely fluid and perfectly normal to move back and forth through them or not to experience them all.

Shock

A stressful situation may cause the release of adrenaline and cortisol hormones, which trigger a natural fight-or-flight response. This can often happen when you have been given the news that your dog is going into Assistance Dog Training, is being withdrawn from the programme, or is being moved to another volunteer, as it is beyond your control. Physical symptoms may involve increased heart rate, confusion, or an inability to think clearly, fatigue and/or numbness. These feelings will pass over time as your body begins to process the situation.

Denial

In a similar way to shock, denial is your body's attempt to slow the process down and protect yourself from emotional trauma. You may find it difficult to accept what you have been told or what you see. You may feel irritable, have fatigue or disturbed sleep, and general restlessness. This stage of grief may be a time when you feel you want to try to seek a second opinion or clarification on any decisions - especially if your dog has not made it into ADT. Denial may be a conscious or unconscious choice and may last for varying lengths of time.

Guilt

This may take many forms and often revolve around things you feel you should or should not have done earlier. These feelings of guilt are perfectly normal and a way of self-punishing, despite there being no way to change

what has happened, and no guarantee there would have been a different outcome if you had. If your dog is having to be moved or withdrawn, it is important you do not blame yourself; it is important to look at things from a different perspective to reframe this guilt.

Anger

If the training programme has not gone as expected and your dog does not come into Assistance Dog Training or is moved, it is easy to become overwhelmingly angry or resentful at the perceived unfairness of the situation, toward your canine professionals, the charity, or other relatives or friends, even anger at the dog. This anger is rarely rational, but it may be overwhelming and all-consuming and is often due to feeling powerless.

Bargaining

It is not unusual to feel desperate and that you would be willing to do anything to alleviate or minimise the pain. This may produce feelings of helplessness or thoughts of 'what if.' This may be fleeting or may be repeated over and over and allows us to hold onto some hope. Often the bargaining stage of grief may be longer in children.

Depression

Depression associated with grief may last a couple of months and is not the same as diagnosed clinical depression, if however, these feelings do not begin to subside it is important to speak to a doctor or healthcare professional. If an individual was clinically depressed at the time of their loss, their feelings may be compounded, and it may take longer to work through this. This stage of grief may cause a range of physical and emotional responses including sadness, anxiety, lack of concentration, fear, isolation, and social withdrawal. These physical and emotional responses are often the first hints at beginning to accept the loss and leads onto the last stage of grief: Acceptance.

Acceptance

This final stage of grief is about accepting the reality of the loss; it is not about closure or no longer feeling sad. Acceptance is about acknowledgement and being able to move forward into a new way of living. The intense feelings of grief (physical and psychological) may return, and you should not worry about this.

The Ball in the Box Analogy

This analogy suggests grief is like a ball inside a box, that has a pain button at the side. In the early days of grief, the ball is large and out of control; when it bounces around inside the box, it frequently hits the pain button. Over time, this ball can become smaller, and it hits the pain button less frequently, but the feelings are just as intense. Some days this ball may be bigger than other days and therefore the pain or emotions are more difficult to control.

Physical aspects of grief

The mind and body are connected and it is important to acknowledge and recognise the physical aspects of grief that you may experience:

- Feeling tired/exhausted – often having no energy for everyday tasks
- Being unable to sleep properly
- Lack of concentration
- Fluctuations in your heart rate
- Nausea or an unsettled tummy
- Changes to your appetite – loss of interest in food or comfort eating
- Lowered immunity
- Aches and pains such as headaches, neck or back pain

Psychological aspects of grief

- Depression/Crying a lot
- Confusion/Inability to think clearly
- Anger/Frustration/Fear/Guilt
- Disturbed sleep/Racing thoughts
- Anxiety



What can I do to help myself through this time?

Grieving is a natural process, which everyone may experience slightly differently; you should allow yourself time. If at any time grief becomes overwhelming, or your physical and psychological symptoms do not begin to ease, we would advise you to speak to a medical or mental health professional for further support.

It is important to recognise that our physical and mental health are linked. Often, we may neglect our physical health during a time of sadness and grief, which may lead to a lowered immune system and may exacerbate the grieving process.

- **Relax** - Find something to do that relaxes you and be kind to yourself; this may be breathing exercises, yoga, reflexology, meditation, or something that works for you as an individual. You could consider activities such as writing a diary, art therapy, craft projects or something you enjoy.
- **Exercise** - Try to get out in the fresh air if you can. Losing your dog can mean that you change your routine of not getting out and walking them. You might find it easier to go somewhere you would not have normally gone with your dog.
- **Sleep** - Lack of, or too much, sleep may impact our physical and mental health. This may be easier said than done! Try to have a good bedtime routine.
- **Routine** - Think about what helps you to relax – a bath, listening to music or a podcast. It is recommended to avoid any electronic devices that emit a blue light before going to bed e.g., computers, tablets, or mobile phones. Think about your environment including lighting, background noises, temperature, bedding, and make use of any scents, such as lavender, that might help you to feel relaxed. There are some great sleep apps that may help with relaxation.
- **Eating and drinking** - Avoid caffeine a couple of hours before going to bed. Similarly avoid eating a big meal or doing excessive exercise close to bedtime.

- **Try to eat a healthy and balanced diet** - You may not feel like you want to eat, or you may feel like you want to eat 'junk' food. It is important to try to eat something nutritious, even if you can only stomach something light.
- **Be wary about resorting to alcohol, drugs (including sleeping pills)** or excessive caffeine intake as this may exasperate psychological (and physical) symptoms of grief.
- **Talking to others** - Talk to friends, family, your Canine Partners Representative, and others who have experienced a Canine Partners dog going into Assistance Dog Training, being withdrawn, or being moved. As a Canine Partners volunteer you are still more than welcome to have as much involvement as you want with your Puppy Training Region. Remember you can also access the Individual Assistance Programme. For further external support please visit our bereavement page on our website caninepartners.org.uk/bereavementsupport or for further internal support please contact a member of the team on bereavementsupport@caninepartners.org.uk.
- **Take one thing at a time** - Try to focus on each individual thing, e.g. I am just going to make myself a cup of tea; I am just going to drink my tea; I am going to make myself a slice a toast etc. Do not try to think too far ahead or become overwhelmed by thinking about the entire day.
- **Remember grief takes time** and there is no quick fix, over time you will find ways to live with your loss and begin to think about the happy memories.

Support and what you can expect from Canine Partners

Your Canine Partners representative will go through what communication you can expect from Canine Partners.

If the dog you've been caring for has been moved, we will contact you at the end of the week to update you on how they are settling in. If you wish to have updates on the dog's progress, please let your Canine Partners representative know, and this can be set up on an individual basis. Alternatively, we will update you when your dog moves to the next stage of training.

Please note that due to GDPR laws, limited personal information regarding the next home can be shared.

Your Canine Partners representative will update at the following times:

- Breeding Team will update the Puppy Training volunteer when the puppy moves into the brood home.
- Puppies from the brood home – updates will be given to the Dog Breeding volunteer at the following times:
 - Day of placement, inform of the safe arrival of each puppy into the puppy home/destination
 - Six weeks after placement
 - At 12 weeks following placement
 - Updates will continue every 12 weeks
 - Upon entering Assistance Dog Training
 - Two further updates while undergoing Assistance Dog Training

- Other updates
 - Any withdrawals, extensions, retirements, deceased canine partner notifications, and changes in career path
- Puppies move into a Foster Home for Assistance Dog Training; updates will be given to the Puppy Training volunteer at the following times:
 - **Week 1:** You should get an update by the end of the week by a trainer to update on how the dog is settling in.
 - **Week 3:** You should get an update on how training has started.
 - **Weeks 4 - 7:** An update of the dog's progress will be given once during this time.
 - **Week 10:** Provided there is a successful matching visit, the following information will be given to you:
 - Dates for commencement of placement
 - Gender of match
 - Partner county location
 - Type of match (power wheelchair/ambulant/ex-services)
 - Placement type (jacketed canine partner assistance dog/home assistance canine/canine companion)
 - For dogs that require longer in Assistance Dog Training: These dogs may not have a regular schedule of training, so there will be a monthly update, which includes the reasons for the additional training time (e.g. health, behaviour), until the dog is either withdrawn from training or matched.
 - Following the placement of a dog: You will be updated of the completed placement as a canine partner, home assistance canine, canine companion and dog ambassador
 - Between week 16 to six months of partnership, a 'partnership update report' will be given.

If you have consented to your contact information being shared, rest assured your information will be passed on. The partner/re-homer is advised to take some time (a minimum of two months) to settle into their new routine and allow the dog time to settle before making contact. Your Canine Partners representative will encourage them to make contact, but this cannot be guaranteed and they may decide not to get in touch or provide updates.

What happens to the dog's equipment?

We will collect the dog's equipment e.g. the dog's bandanas, vet book records, lead flash, tag and all other equipment issued to you. This may be at the time the dog moves on, or a little while later. If you are taking a new dog for us this may be different.

Social media guidance and telling others

Social media is often a big part of our daily lives, and you may choose to share news about your dog moving on. Sharing on your social media platforms to inform people may mitigate the need to notify people individually. However, this is a very personal choice, and there is no right or wrong way to share this news. You may opt to refrain from using social media altogether. Here are some considerations:

- You may post a photo and a brief notification to inform others.
- You have the option to disable comments on your post if you do not wish to receive notifications on your phone, tablet, or computer.
- You may want to take a break from social media for a while – this is absolutely fine, you do not 'owe' anyone an explanation.
- It is entirely reasonable to request that friends or family refrain from contacting you through social media for the time being, allowing you to process things privately.
- Equally, if you find it helpful to stay connected with others, you may post regular updates on your social media platforms or encourage others to share their favourite memories.

Preparing for everyday triggers and conversations

After your Canine Partners dog moves on, there are often many things that crop up in everyday life that can remind us of our loved ones and can invoke happy, but also at times upsetting, memories. Initially, this may include conversations with others, certain items, places, or anniversaries.

It is important to acknowledge that there will be occasions when you are up against a trigger or conversation that you were not expecting. Being mentally prepared for this is an important thing to consider. Emotional reactions to triggers and some conversations is normal. Acknowledging that you are likely to experience these reactions can help you understand them and even turn them into opportunities for healing.



Memory ideas

Microsoft Sway

You will be given a link to an online, live service called Microsoft Sway, which has been prepared individually with photos of your dog at different stages of their journey and will be updated periodically by the relevant departments if your dog remains in the programme.

The first year following a dog moving on may be particularly challenging, with everyday reminders and significant anniversaries. Prepare for these emotions but avoid overthinking or trying to anticipate how you might feel. Remember how you managed your grief initially and be gentle with yourself. Some people find it helpful to have a specific way of memorialising their dog on specific dates, while others prefer to go with their emotions on the day. There is no right or wrong approach; it is about what feels right for you.

We do understand that this is a very unsettling and sad time, and we will do everything that we can to help you. We hope that this guide will provide useful information for practical and emotional support at this time. We appreciate that every situation is unique and if you would like our help with anything please just ask your Canine Partners representative.

If you ever feel like you need any support or wish to talk to someone, you are always welcome to reach out. You can email our dedicated Bereavement Support Team on bereavementsupport@caninepartners.org.uk and we will do everything we can to help.

Next steps with Canine Partners

If you enjoyed your dog-related role as a volunteer, you may be able to repeat the experience. There is no set timeline for getting another Canine Partners dog. Some people may want a new dog soon after the previous one departs, while others prefer to wait for a few weeks or months, or not at all.

Discuss your preferences with your Canine Partners representative. They can provide information about when the next litter of puppies is expected, or the next puppy is moving into Assistance Dog Training which may assist in your decision-making.

However, it may be that a dog-related role is not for you, or that organisational changes make this option unavailable to you, but if you still want to be involved, you may consider another role which can be a fulfilling alternative.

We do understand that this is a very unsettling and sad time, and we will do everything that we can to help you. We hope that this guide has provided useful information for practical help to get you through.





For further external support please visit our bereavement page on the website caninepartners.org.uk/bereavementsupport or for further internal support please contact a member of the team on bereavementsupport@caninepartners.org.uk



Amazing dogs. Transforming lives.